

Oral Testimony of
Dr. E. Calvin Beisner
to the Environment and Public Works Committee
of the
United States Senate
Wednesday, October 20, 2006

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, and distinguished guests, thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. Having never before this year been significantly involved in politics other than to vote in elections, it is strange to find myself here. But my moral convictions as a Christian persuade me that I must speak out on an issue on which literally millions of lives hang in the balance.

As a professor of Christian ethics, I distinguish principles and motives from applications. God through His Word has given us absolute moral principles: You shall have no other gods before Me; you shall not worship idols; you shall not take the name of the Lord in vain; remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy; honor your father and mother; you shall not murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, or covet. As for motives, He says, "Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). These Ten Commandments and these three motives apply to all people, everywhere, in all circumstances.

But it isn't always obvious *how* principles apply, and even with the best motives we may unintentionally do great harm. It is easy to look at an apparent threat and think, "We can solve that this way." But sometimes we misunderstand the nature, causes, or extent of the threat, or fail to compare one threat with others that might be more significant, and so we prescribe solutions that won't work, that unintentionally cause more harm than they prevent, or that divert investment from more helpful measures. What would have happened, for example, had Congress legally mandated the use of DES, a drug widely thought in the 1950s to reduce the risk of miscarriage later but found to be ineffective for that but to raise the risk of cervical and uterine cancer for women exposed to it in utero? Great harm, instead of the good intended—and reversing its use would have taken far longer than it did without the legal mandate.

For eighteen years I have been studying the ethics, economics, and science of environmental stewardship, especially global warming. I have read major books on global warming by leading scientists on all sides of the controversy, studied the IPCC Assessment Reports, and read hundreds of scholarly and popular articles. My study convinces me that there is a major disjunct between the best science and economics in the field, on the one hand, and popular media and public opinion, on the other. Time forbids detail here, but I have submitted fuller written testimony and request, Mr. Chairman, that it be included in the record.

Popular opinion is that human emissions of carbon dioxide are the majority cause of current warming, which is greater than any in history and will become catastrophic by the middle of this century, and that we can and must prevent that catastrophe by reducing CO₂ emissions. In contrast, as climatologist Roy Spencer, environmental economist Ross McKittrick, energy policy analyst Paul

Driessen, and I argued in “A Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor: An Evangelical Response to Global Warming” (www.interfaithstewardship.org), submitted herewith, the best science and economics indicate that

- current warming is within the range of natural variability;
- human emissions of CO₂ are a minor cause of global warming, but they enhance plant growth and so contribute to feeding the human population and all other species;
- global warming is unlikely to become catastrophic in the foreseeable future;
- no achievable reductions in CO₂ emissions would reduce future temperature detectably, let alone enough to avert catastrophe; and
- such efforts would fruitlessly divert scarce resources from other endeavors that would be of far greater benefit to humanity.

Rather than focus narrowly on a single problem, we must choose carefully where to invest our limited resources. The hundreds of billions of dollars per year it would cost the global economy to significantly reduce CO₂ emissions would be of little or no benefit to humanity. When the scholars of the Copenhagen Consensus ranked seventeen challenges facing humanity, the three *best* investments were fighting communicable diseases, fighting malnutrition and hunger by providing micronutrients, and liberalizing trade, while the three *worst* investments all had to do with reducing CO₂ emissions to mitigate global warming. Money would be far better spent on AIDS and malaria prevention, water sanitation, and nutrition.

A clean, healthful environment being a costly good, wealthier communities better afford it than poorer ones, and affordable energy is crucial to creating wealth. Electrifying the billion or more homes that use wood and dung as their chief fuels for heating and cooking would eliminate most of the 1.6 million premature deaths per year that the World Health Organization attributes to indoor smoke. Sharing technology with rapidly growing economies like India and China would speed both their adoption of cleaner fuels and their economic development. The strong correlation between economic development and improved health and life expectancy underscores the morality of such a policy. It would be morally unconscionable to force the world’s developing countries to delay their climb out of poverty by denying them, as would any serious cuts in CO₂ emissions, the cheap, abundant energy available from carbon fuels.

The Bible tells us to “remember the poor” (Galatians 2:10). We need not, in order to identify the morally preferable global climate policy, resolve the enormously complex controversy over the causes and extent of global warming or the possibility of mitigating it. There is one thing we already know quite well: a richer society endures any catastrophe better than a poorer one. If we want to help the world’s poor, we shall do so far better by helping them become wealthy and able to adapt to whatever temperature the future holds than by slowing their economic development, condemning them to additional generations of poverty and its attendant suffering, and depriving them of the wealth they need to triumph over any future catastrophe. I urge you, therefore, to support policies that will

promote economic development—for the sake of both the world’s poor, and the world’s environment.

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